County of Loudoun Department of Fire-Rescue Services Press Release

For Additional Information:

Mary L. Maguire, PIO, Loudoun County Fire-Rescue Services Or Kevin Johnson, Emergency Services Officer (703) 777-0333 Tuesday, May 21, 2002

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Hurricane Season is Approaching

Hurricane season is fast approaching. In Virginia, with its history of deadly storms, being prepared can mean the difference between life and death. Coastal residents must be ready to either ride out a storm at home or to evacuate; inland residents must know how to prepare for floods and high winds and know what to do when they strike.

It is important to remember that every county and city in the state is vulnerable in some way to the destructive forces of hurricanes, even counties that are far inland, like Loudoun, are vulnerable to the affects of hurricanes. Whether the threat comes from violent winds, storm surge, flash flooding, or spawned tornadoes, the important factor in saving lives and property is by prepared.

Kevin Johnson, Emergency Services Officer for Loudoun County, states that it is especially important to be prepared for hurricane season, June 1 to November 30. Floods cause more damage and loss of life than any other natural disaster. In less than a year, flooding that has resulted in millions of dollars of damage, has impacted hundreds of families and business across the Commonwealth. Johnson states that no matter where you live in Virginia, you need to be prepared. Hurricanes, once they make landfall, can produce extensive flooding and high winds hundreds of miles from the coast.

Last year, forty-eight cities and counties in Virginia stretching as far west as Halifax were declared eligible for disaster assistance as a result of Hurricane Floyd. Furthermore, 50 of the 56 Floyd deaths were attributed to inland flooding. Hurricanes such as Fran in 1996, Juan in 1985, Agnes in 1972, and Camille in 1969 also caused significant inland flooding. Camille was Virginia's worst disaster, taking the greatest number of lives with 153 fatalities.

The Loudoun County Department of Fire and Rescue services encourages residents to take a few minutes now to protect themselves and their property from the affects of these destructive storms. In conjunction with the Virginia Department of Emergency Services and the National Weather Service, Loudoun County Fire and Rescue Services offers the following to help protect lives and reduce damages before, during and after hurricanes and flooding.

Before the Storm

- ♦ Familiarize yourself with the terminology:
 - Flood Watch means that a flood is possible in your area;
 - Flood Warning means flooding is already occurring or will occur soon in your area;
 - Flash Floods can develop in a matter of minutes, so if you hear a Flash Flood Warning take action immediately.
- Secure garbage cans, lawn furniture or anything that could fly around and cause damage.
- ♦ Trim back dead or weak branches from trees.
- ♦ Learn the safest route from your home or place of business to areas that are safe from high winds or flooding. If there is a flood, you may only have minutes to get to safety.
- ◆ Decide on an out-of –state friend or family member to be the single point of contact for your family (after a disaster, it's often easier to call long distance). Make sure everyone in the family knows the name, address, and phone number of the contact person.
- Decide on a meeting place away from home where you and your family will gather if you become separated (this will be useful in other types of disasters as well).
- Keep a family emergency kit stocked and handy. Include items like flashlights and batteries, battery-operated radio, water, first aid supplies, canned food and can opener, etc.
- Purchase flood insurance. Flood damage to your home and its contents is not covered by your homeowner's insurance policy. A 30-day waiting period is required for your flood insurance policy to become effective.
- Make an itemized list of all your personal property for insurance verification purposes.

If Heavy Rains Occur

- If advised to evacuate, do so immediately; move to a safe area before access is cut off by floodwater.
- Keep your battery-operated radio tuned to a local station, and follow all instructions. If you are told to evacuate, move out of the house or building to safe, high ground.
- ♦ Be aware that floods are deceptive. Do not wade into flooded areas. Turn around and go back to higher ground.
- Never drive across a flooded road. The road could be washed out and rapidly rising water could lift your car and carry it away. As little as six inches of floodwater can cause you to lose control of your vehicle; two feet can sweep it away. If you find floodwaters on the road while driving, turn around and find an alternate route.

After the Flood

- When it is safe to return to your home, before you enter the house, be sure that the structure is not in danger
 of collapsing. Watch out for rodents and snakes.
- ♦ Watch for live electrical wires. Be sure the electrical current is turned off, and do not attempt to turn on any electrically operated light or appliance until an electrician has checked your system.
- Begin cleanup as soon as possible. Throw out perishable foods; they may be contaminated. Wash canned goods in soap and warm water.
- Do not drink water unless you know that it is safe; water sources are often contaminated during floods.
- ♦ Never allow children to play in or near floodwaters.

For further life-saving safety and preparedness tips, contact Kevin Johnson, Loudoun County Emergency Services Officer at 703-777-0333, or visit the Virginia Department of Emergency Services Web site at http://www.vdes.state.va.us.